

U.S. Archivist Visits USS Constitution Museum on Navy's Birthday

By Seaman Shannon S. Heavin, USS Constitution Public Affairs

CHARLESTOWN, Mass. (NNS) -- The archivist of the United States spoke at the USS Constitution Museum in Charlestown on the Navy's 235th birthday Oct. 13.

David S. Ferriero spoke to approximately 100 guests and Sailors about the controversy of the Navy's true birthplace.

"It is moving to be here," said Ferriero. "On the way to USS Constitution, driving along the waterline and seeing her from a distance, just felt breathtaking as it does to be here [USS Constitution Museum] to discuss the proclamation of the Navy."

Beverly and Marblehead, Mass.; Machias, Maine; Philadelphia; Providence, R.I.; and Whitehall, N.Y. all claim in their history books to be the birth city of the Navy. During his speech, Ferriero presented historical notes and documents from acts of the Continental Congress, such as the Act of October 13, 1775 and the Naval Armament Act.

His speech concluded with guests voting for the city they thought was the birthplace of the Navy by chanting "Huzzah."

"The cheer 'Huzzah' goes back to the time of the first six frigates and is the culture of USS Constitution and United States Navy, which brought us to what we stand for today," said Chief Hospital Corpsman (SW/SS) Jason Shaeffer, Constitution's independent duty corpsman.

Machias, Providence, Philadelphia and Whitehall received one or two votes, while Marblehead and Beverly received the most. Ferriero said he might be biased, as he's a native of Beverly, and thinks it was the true birthplace; however, the answer still remains a mystery today.

Ferriero also met with Cmdr. Timothy Cooper, 71st in command of Constitution, and museum staff members to review artifacts in possession by the museum relating to the beginnings of the United States Navy. Sarah Watkins, a museum archivist, showed a seabag dating back to 1824, belonging to Gunner John Lord, who served aboard Constitution.

"The museum has artifacts that are rarely displayed, and they seem like hidden gems; viewing them today has been a treasure in itself," said Cooper. "This is the perfect way to celebrate the Navy's birthday with archivist David Ferriero. It is his second visit here in the past six months, and he is always welcome. He's a true friend of the ship and crew."

Constitution is located in the Charlestown Navy Yard in Boston. She is the world's oldest commissioned warship afloat and welcomes more than 500,000 visitors a year.

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